

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CPR-01 PM-05 OPR-02 PA-01 PRS-01
SS-15 SY-05 A-01 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 TRSE-00
AF-10 L-03 OES-07 ACDA-07 SP-02 /073 W
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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1486

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 10452

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP (TINDEMANS), EAIR, BE, US

SUBJECT: VISIT OF PRIMEMINISTER TINDEMANS: DISCUSSION TOPICS:
SABENA'S ASPIRATIONS FOR A SECOND GATEWAY TO THE U.S.

REF: BRUSSELS 10322

1. BELGIANS CONSIDER QUESTION OF SECOND LANDING POINT IN U.S.
FOR SABENA TO BE THE MOST IMPORTANT BILATERAL ISSUE BETWEEN THE
U.S. AND BELGIUM. QUESTION WAS RAISED BY TINDEMANS IN LETTER TO
VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE LAST JANUARY AND HE IS CERTAIN TO BRING
IT UP AGAIN WITH THE PRESIDENT.
2. BELGIANS ARE REQUESTING THAT ATLANTA BE DESIGNATED AS SABENA'S
SECOND LANDING POINT. INITIAL CONSULTATIONS ON THIS REQUEST
WERE TO HAVE BEEN HELD IN WASHINGTON DURING WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 5
(I.E., JUST BEFORE OR DURING TINDEMANS VISIT), BUT LATEST
INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO EMBASSY IS THAT DEPARTMENT MAY ASK
THAT TALKS BE POSTPONED UNTIL OCTOBER.
3. ALTHOUGH WE EXPECT THAT BELGIANS WILL PRESENT FULL RANGE
OF ECONOMIC ARGUMENTS TO JUSTIFY A SECOND LANDING POINT IN U.S.
FOR SABENA (E.G., THE AIRLINE'S FINANCIAL PROBLEMS, THE DESIRE
FOR ACCESS TO ECONOMICALLY DYNAMIC SOUTH), QUESTION OF BELGIAN
AMOUR-PROPRE IS OF AT LEAST EQUAL IF NOT GREATER IMPORTANCE.

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BELGIANS FEEL SLIGHTED IN COMPARISON TO NATIONAL AIRLINES OF
OTHER SMALL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES (AUSTRIA, IRELAND, SPAIN,
THE NETHERLANDS, SWITZERLAND), ALL OF WHOM HAVE MORE THAN A
SINGLE GATEWAY TO U.S. BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS TOLD US
THEY BELIEVE BELGIUM "HAS BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST" BY U.S.
IN CIVIL AVIATION FIELD BY COMPARISON WITH TREATMENT ACCORDED
OTHER SMALLER EUROPEAN NATIONS.

4. BELGIANS RECOGNIZE THAT CIVIL AIR ROUTE DESIGNATIONS ARE DECISIONS TAKEN AT HIGHEST LEVEL OF USG. SINCE, REALISTICALLY, BELGIUM WOULD NOT HAVE MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO PUT ITS CASE DIRECTLY TO THE PRESIDENT, WE WOULD EXPECT TINDEMANS TO USE THIS OCCASION TO MAKE STRONG PITCH FOR ATLANTA, PERHAPS REMINDING THE PRESIDENT OF ENCOURAGEMENT HE GAVE SABENA'S CASE WHEN HE WAS GOVERNOR OF GEORGIA.

5. ALTHOUGH EMBASSY IS NOT IN POSITION TO ASSESS THE WORTH OF THE BELGIAN CLAIM IN CONTEXT OF OVERALL U.S. CIVIL AIR POLICY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHER ROUTE CLAIMANTS, WE DO BELIEVE THAT BELGIAN REQUEST SHOULD BE GIVEN FULL AND SYMPATHETIC HEARING. ACCOMMODATION OF THEIR REQUEST WOULD REMOVE WHAT IS OTHERWISE SURE TO BE A CONTINUING IRRITANT IN U.S.-BELGIAN BILATERAL RELATIONS. CHAMBERS

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